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EVACUATION AND INTERNMENT OF THE WEST COAST JAPANESE

Despite my oriental features, and a different cultural upbringing from yours, I am speaking to you today as a fellow-American. I was born and raised in the state of California, and because I was of Japanese descent, I became a part of what has been described as the largest single compulsory evacuation in American history. And to young people like you, the World War II, Pearl Harbor and its aftermath, must seem like past history, something that you read about in books, but very little is mentioned of this exodus in textbooks. Yet more is now being published on this very event that I have been asked to speak about, so there is a growing awareness of what happened to a minority people back in 1942.

The United States, as you well know, has attracted for decades people of many nationalities, and I am sure that among you yourselves there is a blend of European origins. The Pacific Coast drew towards its shores Asiatic immigrants, just as the Atlantic coast received immigrants from Europe, and the Japanese formed one of the last, and the smallest, of our immigrant groups.

The Japanese immigrants first settled in Hawaii to work on the sugar and pineapple plantations. They also began coming to the West Coast, and there were about 16,000 by the end of the nineteenth century. But they were not welcomed on the mainland; they became the object of deep, anti-oriental hostility that had been directed earlier against the Chinese settlers. The first generation Japanese, called the Issei, were ineligible then for citizenship, and the West Coast newspapers for years kept printing sensational stories about the "Yellow Peril."

In 1906 in San Francisco, Mayor Eugene Schmitz and his political boss launched an anti-Japanese crusade, when they were about to be indicted for graft and corruption. They ordered that all Japanese children in that city to be segregated in an oriental school. This mandate aroused a storm of controversy. Even President Theodore Roosevelt denounced the order as a "wicked absurdity." But to have this order rescinded, the President had to receive Mayor Schmitz in the White House and act to bar the Japanese from entering the Japanese from entering the United States from Hawaii, Canada, or Mexico.

But this presidential order was not enough for anti-oriental organizations, like the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League, which intensified a boycott of Japanese businesses. Finally the White House announced the so-called "Gentlemen's Agreement" with Japan to restrict immigration. But this restriction did not end the agitation against the Issei, but rather shifted the focus of attack to California's farms.

Nine out of ten of the first immigrants had been unmarried men from the farm areas of southern Japan. But they were not content to continue working in this country as poorly paid, migrant field hands. So after saving enough carefully and living very frugally, they would purchase a few acres, usually land that no one else considered any good. Applying what they knew of intensive cultivation learned in Japan, they converted waste-lands into some of the most productive areas in the West.

But in this trend towards independent farming, the influential fruit ranchers foresaw the loss of their most reliable source of migrant labor, and in 1912 they started a propaganda campaign that pictured the Japanese as overrunning the country. So they obtained the passage of a law which prohibited further land purchases by "aliens ineligible to citizenship", namely the Issei. Nine other states then adopted similar laws. The Issei then had to turn to other ways of making a living, so they opened retail fruit and vegetable stores in the West Coast cities.

The "Gentlemen's Agreement" had put an end to the influx of Japanese men, but it did permit those already in this country to bring their wives. My own father did not come to this country as a laborer, but as a student. He had finished high school in Japan, but after coming to this country he started in high school all over again to learn English. It is interesting to remember that in Sacramento, California, where I spent my childhood, the Sutter Junior High School I attended was once my father's high school. And my mother came to this country as a school teacher. She and my father had become engaged in Japan, and theirs was a long engagement of ten years, and they were married in California in 1915.

The feeling of the white population was that the prolific Japanese had come to raise large families and crowd out the white people. The 1940 census showed 126,947 persons of Japanese ancestry in the United States, 112,353 of them in the three West Coast states, and 93,717 of those in California. Of those on the West Coast, 71,484 were American-born citizens, the Nisei, and 40,869 were the Issei. In 1940, the average age of the Issei was about 50 years of age; that of the Nisei around 19 or 20. The concentration of the Japanese was not only geographical, but also occupational, with 43 per cent in agriculture; the additional 26 per cent in wholesale and retail trade. In 1941, the Japanese turned out 42 per cent of the truck crop in California, the production valued at \$30,000,000.

The Japanese parents, the Issei, all felt that education would enable their children to be free of the intolerance and discrimination that they had had to face, so they began sending their sons and daughters to colleges and professional schools, often through difficult and tremendous sacrifice. Of my own family of nine children, of whom I am the oldest, there were five of us enrolled at one time at the University of California at Berkeley. We went to the University of California, because years before my father had majored in mining engineering at the same university but had never been able to pursue his career. by 1940, 46 per cent of the West Coast Nisei between the ages of 16 and 24 were students.

But prejudice did not vanish. As the American-born generation graduated from the universities, they found it almost impossible to obtain the jobs for which they were qualified. Engineers worked as auto mechanics, and my father earned his living as a life insurance agent. Girls with Ph.D.'s had to take jobs as housemaids. Graduate chemists and physicists often worked in their fathers' fruit stores. And so before the war, the Japanese on the West Coast, like the rest of the world, lived and worked in their accustomed places:

A fisherman on a tuna clipper out from Terminal Island. Baptist minister in Gardena. At dusk in the San Joaquin valley a farmer worked in the field with his family, stooped over melons. "Texas Mary" in a saloon in Salinas. A landscape gardener in Beverly Hills; Buddhist priest in Fresno; a housemaid in Seattle; Tokyo Club down Jackson Street in Los Angeles with blackjack and "hana" (a Japanese card game). At El Centro, a housewife frugally patched her husband's clothes and thought of her boy and girl in college and of the long road to optometry and pharmacy. A nurse entered a patient's temperature on a chart in a San Francisco hospital; groups of migrant workers followed the season for picking apricots and other fruits up and down the coast, and spent their money as they got it in cards and liquor. At a university, a student graduated with the highest honors.

These were the Japanese, not one type, not one homogeneous cultural pattern, but men and women, and their children, large and small, fat and thin; the healthy and the sickly; the good and the bad; of different layers of society, of all degrees of American and Nipponese traits.

Then World War II brought changes into the lives of many peoples around the earth. One small aspect of all this change was the evacuation of the Japanese from the Pacific Coast. And this is what I shall be describing for you, as I lived through its phases. That time seems a long ago, but not as remote as it may seem to you. Had it not been for the evacuation, however, I would not be here this evening to share my memories with you.

So now let me take you back in time. At 7:55 a.m., Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, the United States Naval Station, Pearl Harbor, on the island of Oahu, Territory of Hawaii, was attacked by Japanese aircraft. At that hour, I was giving my little son, not quite three months old, his morning feeding. Listening to that radio broadcast, I felt stunned, because my immediate thought was how we Japanese living in this country would be affected. I learned. By nightfall, the Japanese on the West Coast had begun to feel the effect. All Japanese friends were frozen by the next day. Because of prohibitions against trading with the enemy, grocers refused to sell food; milk companies ceased to deliver, and I found that I could not buy milk at the corner grocery store where I had been going for months. Wholesalers stopped supplying Japanese merchants. At the same time, there was general tightening of credit from the usual 30 days to a week, and often the terms were strictly COD.

On December 10, 1941, Attorney General Biddle issued the following statement: "So long as the aliens in this country conduct themselves in accordance with the law, they may be assured that every effort will be made to protect them from any discrimination or abuse. This assurance is given not only in justice and decency to the loyal non-citizens in this country but also in the hope that it may spare American citizens in enemy countries unjust retaliation."

Yet in the panicky weeks after Pearl Harbor, Feeling against the Japanese ran high. A superpatriot chopped four Japanese cherry trees along the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C. The Tennessee State Department of Purchasing declared "open season on Japs, no license required", and an elderly Japanese man and his wife were shot to death in their beds in El Centro, California. And my brother Roy enlisted in the United States Army, after he was turned down by the Air Force because of vision.

Immediately with the beginning of the war, the Department of Justice through the Federal Bureau of Investigation had arrested registered enemy agents and persons known to have hostile intentions. Then followed repeated investigations and arrests wherever there were grounds for suspicions.

On December 11, 1941, the Western Defense Command was established, and the West Coast was declared a theater of war, with General J.L. DeWitt designated as military commander. After the Roberts Report on Pearl Harbor was published, public temper on the West Coast became spiteful, and by the end of January, 1942, the commentators and columnists, professional "patriots", witch hunters, varied groups and persons began inflaming public opinion. We were already under curfew, and had to be off the streets by eight p.m., and we were finding it hard to shop or market for our large family. It should be pointed out that the Roberts Report referred to espionage activities in Hawaii, but silent on the question of sabotage. For months after the release of the Roberts Report, it was generally assumed on the West Coast that acts of sabotage had been committed in Hawaii. It is ironical to recall that when my brother Roy was in boot camp, his buddies nicknamed him Sabotage, and later Private Snafumoto, since our surname was Suyemoto.

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order no. 9066 authorizing the War Department to set up military areas and to exclude any or all persons from these areas. The next day this responsibility was delegated to General DeWitt. On March 2, 1942, DeWitt, by proclamation, established Military Areas nos. 1 and 2, and on March 27, 1942, prohibited all persons of Japanese ancestry from leaving these areas.

In the city a mounting number of aliens were being drawn into the Federal Bureau of Investigation net, many on the slightest accusation. There were Buddhist priests,

school teachers, Christian ministers, invalids, an 85-year-old veteran of the Russo-Japanese War who was deaf and half-blind, with cancer of the stomach. The Japanese members of the American Legion found themselves preparing for probable internment. These men who had fought in World War I and were cooperating with the authorities in every way to make the evacuation easier asked themselves, "What did I fight for in the last war?"

No one knew exactly when our evacuation order would be issued. Everyone was tense, not knowing what to do, how to make preparations and when. But by a series of 108 separate orders, DeWitt ordered all Japanese removed from Military Areas nos. 1 and 2, which included all of Washington, Oregon and California, and a portion of Arizona. By June 5, 1942, all Japanese were removed from Military Area no. 1, the coastal area, and by August 7, 1942, Military Area no. 2, the eastern part of the three West Coast states had also been cleared. The explanation given at that time for the mass evacuation was that of military necessity, the decision for the order resting in DeWitt, even though by February 14, 1942, he knew that no acts of sabotage had occurred in Hawaii. No Japanese-American, either in Hawaii or on the mainland, has ever been convicted of either sabotage or espionage. DeWitt's decision involved a judgment on sociological grounds, and racial considerations were evidently regarded as part of the military necessity, requiring mass evacuation. So it was that what was later called "our worst wartime mistake" happened.

On March 2, 1942, the first evacuation areas were named, and on March 10, the Wartime Civilian Control Administration was established to assist in the evacuation. Since no preparation had been made for so huge a mass exodus, fairgrounds and race tracks were commandeered for use as temporary assembly centers, and there eighteen of these. Army engineers went to work immediately to construct twenty-eight shelters a day in these centers to house the evacuees -- primitive barracks to provide temporary quarters for 110,000 people.

With others living around the San Francisco region, my family was sent from Berkeley to the Tanforan Race Track in San Bruno, south of San Francisco. The evacuation itself was handled on an area basis, as one district after another was designated for exclusion. On the day appointed for leaving, all the Japanese within the area, citizens and aliens alike, reported at a specified place. In Berkeley the larger families were moved out first, and we learned of this, a day before we had to leave, from a phone call from my brother Bill who was teaching bacteriology at the University of California. Since we were to be permitted only two pieces of luggage per person, my mother organized us into work-squads, assembling clothing to take, discarding and repacking what we would have to leave behind. Fortunately, our large collection of books had already been packed and stored with a Caucasian friend. I called the Salvation Army and the Goodwill Industries that the basement door would be left unlocked on the side of the house, and that they could call for clean clothing, household equipment and furniture the next day. That day blurs in sequence, as I recall that I had to go to the Wartime Civilian Control Administration office uptown to get identification tags for the family and our luggage, shop for baby necessities, stopping by a friend's home to say goodbye, and rushing back to wash clothes. Through most of the night, Bill kept a bonfire going in the backyard to burn accumulations of old letters, school papers, things that we simply could not take with us, or leave behind. It was not until we started discarding cherished possessions that we were impressed by the fact that we were being moved out -- away from the roomy house that we had known as home for many years, from friends, from familiar surroundings.

The morning of our departure from Berkeley, a sunny April day, we gathered at a church, surrounded by military sentries standing guard with drawn bayonets. The church women were serving sandwiches and tea, but no one seemed to be at all hungry. We were then taken by chartered buses, under military guard, from Berkeley to Tanforan, and at the intake station under the grandstand, the men were searched from head to feet for contraband, and my father had his pocket-knife confiscated. Our family, now to be known by the family number of 13423, and not by our surname, was assigned to horse-stalls in one corner of the race track. The size of our family seemed to be of concern to the housing staff, but with twelve members we were allowed to have two horse-stalls, Bar-

racks 6, Rooms 21 and 22.

What had been done to make living quarters out of the stalls was to build them out with partitions, so that the swinging half-doors divided the 20-foot by 9-foot space into two rooms. The roof sloped down from a height of 12-foot in the rear to 7-foot in the front room. Below the rafters an open space extended the entire length of the stable. The rear room had housed a horse and showed evidences of the former tenant, with deep hoof-marks on the walls, bits of hay whitewashed into the cracks, and a strong smell that seemed even more pervasive on damp days. My son who developed allergic tendencies in camp for the rest of his life had a four-plus reaction to horse dander, though he never came in contact with a horse.

At first, until the assembly center was filled, the families ate in the common dining room, which was the ground (actual dirt) floor of the immense grandstand. This was the mess-hall for the 8000 evacuees in our assembly center. At mealtimes, there would be lines blocks long, waiting to be served. After the first meal, we soon learned to take along tissue paper to wipe our plates clean before receiving our food. My brother Bill remarked that the only difference he could see on the twice-daily menu of beans, boiled potatoes in their jackets, plain bread and tea was the color of the beans! Eventually the camp was divided into block-areas, and more mess-halls were built to provide for each area. More food supplies came in, as the camp became more settled, and we began to have variety in our menus.

The assembly center was far from being completed when we arrived. Carpenters were still building barracks in the center field of the race track. Additional wash-rooms, shower rooms, and laundry buildings were constructed. We had no furniture, except the army cots, so we "salvaged" scrap lumber, and my father made stools and a table. None of the stools were of the same height, but served their purpose.

During the first month, typhoid and smallpox injections were given at a wholesale rate, without yea or nay. One just stood in line to be jabbed in the arm. My sister Hisa, a medical technologist, worked along with the doctors and nurses. The hospital, a barracks building at the far end of the racetrack, at that time was not fully equipped, nor was there a dispensary.

Even here in the assembly center curfew was imposed, and roll call was held every day at 6:45 a.m. and 6:45 p.m. Each barracks had a house captain who made the rounds to check on us, and at times, young children made his house-check a chore by visiting friends in and out the stalls. Day and night Caucasian camp police walked their beats within the center, on the lookout for contraband. One of them saw my mother reading in Japanese, so he took her book away. Later it was returned to her, without comment, because it was her Japanese Bible.

Civil liberties were at a minimum. The entire camp was closely guarded, surrounded by watch towers manned by armed sentries, and searchlights played around the camp at night. We were introduced to, and trained in, communal living from the beginning of our internment. Since the partitions between the rooms did not reach the ceiling, a comment spoken in ordinary tone of voice would carry the entire length of the barracks, so that private conversation, not intended for the neighborly audience, had to be whispered against the ear. To those of us accustomed to walking but a few steps from the bedroom to the bathroom, the bathroom situation posed a problem. Now we had a distance of half a block to the nearest latrine, in all kinds of weather. Here at Tanforan, and later at Topaz, Utah, there was no running water piped to the barracks.

Churches were established early to bolster the morale of the distressed and humiliated people. There were Protestant, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist and Buddhist groups. Another help to morale was the opportunity to work, and those who were physically able worked. The wages of the workers were set at eight dollars a month for the unskilled; twelve dollars a day for the skilled; and sixteen dollars for the professionals (doctors, teachers, and people in administrative positions.) Later, in Topaz, the salary scale was increased to twelve, sixteen, and nineteen for the various levels. In addition, a clothing allowance of \$3.75 per month was issued to each worker and his de-

pendents, with the allowance scaled down for children. The smallest of the paychecks first issued was for four cents, and it cost ten cents to cash it. An adult's clothing allowance did not cover the cost of a child's pair of shoes.

The assembly center had a canteen under the grandstand, but usually there was little to buy. Friends on the "outside" saved newspapers and magazines and sent them in to us. Standing in queues became a customary procedure. We stood and waited in line for mail, paychecks, meals, showers, wash-basins, laundry tubs, toilets, clinic service, for purchases at the canteen.

Schools were eventually established for adults and children, and volunteer evacuee teachers were employed. Some schools, on learning of the impending evacuation, had accelerated the teaching of their Japanese students so they could receive full credit for the term; others not that concerned were not so helpful. To young people who had grown in closely knit family groups, with school friends of different nationalities, camp life meant disruption of orderly living, sudden freedom from parental authority and school, and a few of them did abuse this new liberty. But the majority still needed the stabilizing influence and guidance of a regular school program.

This need was recognized by a group of young volunteers, who were recent graduates of universities in the San Francisco bay area. They first met and discussed what could be done. They proposed teaching their major subjects to the high school students. So notices concerning the opening of a "high school" were posted around the race track and mess halls, and to our amazement, 500 high school students registered for classes of their own accord. The curriculum was based on the core curriculum of the California school system. I taught English, because that had been one of my majors at the university.

The conditions under which these high school classes were taught were unlike anything ever experienced in an organized school. The large open area of the grandstand inside, where betting windows lined one wall, was used for the whole school, without any partitions between the classes. I had to out-lecture the civics instructor to my left, the mathematics instructor to the right, and the public speaking instructor straight ahead. There were occasional disciplinary problems, but I did enjoy my students.

Rumors began to seep through the center in August that the evacuees would be moved to a more permanent camp -- a relocation center in Utah. Ten relocation centers were built from California to Arkansas, and managed under a new civilian agency, the War Relocation Authority, headed at first by Milton S. Eisenhower, superseding the War-time Civilian Control Administration. Bulletins began to appear on how to prepare for the moving, but no one knew till September when the relocation would begin. Again there were the stir and unrest of preparations and packing and crating. Two days before the departure everything had to be inspected, tagged and ready for pickup.

The first group that left from our assembly center for Utah was the advance work group of 214 people, all volunteers, to make way for the induction of those who were to follow. Among them was my brother Bill, a bacteriologist, on the sanitary engineering crew. Since our horse-stall barracks was the closest to the fence near the departure gate, we soon discovered that our stable-roof provided the best seats for send-offs. Residents would climb up on the roof with hand-painted bon voyage signs and banners, some with the message, "See you soon!"

The Utah relocation center was situated on the "Plains of Abraham", where a Mormon pastor had once prophesied, after he had failed in attempts at cultivation, that a "new people will come along and make the desert bloom some day." The Utah center began to fill, as one contingent after another were shipped out of the assembly center. The volunteers who had gone ahead worked at the receiving stations, interviewing, registering, housing, and explaining to travel-weary newcomers what they must do and where they must go. The volunteers later became clerks, stenographers and receptionists in administrative offices, filled necessary positions in the small emergency hospital, laid the foundation of a kind of municipal civil service composed of block managers, and set up the community store. The new arrivals, coming in a steady stream, were poured into the empty blocks, as into a row of bottles. The reception procedure became known as the "in-

take", and it left a lasting impression on all who witnessed it.

My family, with the exception of Bill, arrived at the Central Utah Relocation Center on October 3, 1942, and Bill was there at the intake gate, waiting for us. A small band of Boy Scouts tooted and blared out in the dust and heat their version of "Hail, hail, the gang's all here." Though we had grown accustomed to the sight of barracks in Tanforan, the sight of the new camp was a desolate scene, where hundreds of low, black, tar-papered barracks were lined up in rows through each block. I think you can gain something of my first impression of this camp from a rough draft of a letter to an "outside" friend that I had written on October 7:

"We finally reached Utah on Saturday morning, and since then we have been trying to become accustomed to weather conditions here. The morning chill is something so different from California temperature that we find it difficult to bear, especially when it turns so warm in the afternoon, 108 degrees this noon. But, I suppose, with time one can become conditioned to sudden changes.

"The trip was rather irksome across Nevada, but not altogether unpleasant. We came here to Topaz from Delta by bus, and we were greeted by earlier arrivals and a small, but brave, brass band. The band members tooted "Hail to California", and when I heard my school song, I wanted to hide my face and cry, but I did not dare.

"Our family was assigned to the block near the hospital ("near", but a good walking distance from there) and administrative buildings, so friends tell us that we are extremely well situated. But you should have seen the rooms we walked into, unfinished walls and ceiling, bare, with a two-inch layer of fine dust on the floor and window-sills. We had to shovel out the dust, sweep and mop before we could even set our suitcases down. We felt stifled by the dust, and cannot escape it at all. We did not get our cots until last night, and then only two mattresses for the eleven of the cots! So we had to make up makeshift beds."

The Utah camp was only two-thirds finished at the time we arrived. The entire Topaz project area occupied 17,500 acres. The center contained 42 city blocks, of which 36 comprised the residential areas, one square mile in extent. All residential blocks looked alike, and people would get lost all the time. Each block consisted of 14 resident barracks, made to standard Army measurements, 24 feet wide and 96 feet long, partitioned into rooms, with the smallest rooms at the ends of the building, to accommodate a couple, and larger rooms in the middle for larger family units. Our family was larger than most, so we were permitted to have the two center rooms, but in order to go from one room to the other, one had to go outside and then into the other room. Mother became tired of having to do this whenever she wanted to speak to any of my brothers, so my father cut out a section of the intervening wall and hung a curtain there.

These 14 barracks or apartment houses were arranged in two rows with an alley between. In this alley way were located the latrine building that housed the shower stalls, lavatories, and laundry facilities, and the mess hall building. There was no running water in the barracks, so if one needed drinking water, one had to remember to carry some utensil to taking water back to one's room.

The population of Topaz, christened the "Jewel of the Desert" by the residents, numbered approximately 10,000, with most of the people from the San Francisco bay area. Since Topaz was 4,650 feet above sea level, the winters tended to be very cold and long, as the snows began early in autumn and ended late in the spring. The heaviest snow fell in February, and sometimes throughout March and April, sometimes even in May. One year the Easter egg-hunt was held in the snow, with little children digging excitedly in deep snow for colored, boiled eggs, which were well iced. Dust storms were always prevalent, and a stiff wind could stir up a blinding dust storm which could blot out the adjacent buildings and turn a room with all its contents a gritty gray.

An "indefinite leave" program was started by which the evacuees, after proper clearance by the government and assurance of a job "outside", could leave the camp and

settle in a city of their choice. Also, by 1943, the Army had decided to recruit a Japanese-American combat team. It took the nucleus of the much-decorated 442nd Regimental Combat Team of Nisei from the camps. In our own camp, we had a number of Bronze Star and Purple Heart mothers.

In December, 1944, the Supreme Court ruled 6 to 3 that, given the situation that existed and the information available in 1942, the Japanese evacuation was a valid exercise of the government's war power -- which the Court had previously said was not only the power to wage war, but to "wage war successfully." The Court also ruled that citizens whose loyalty had been established could not be held in the camps. The Army had decided to rescind the exclusion order.

So the camps began to close down, and once again we were seeing friends off at the departure gate. As residents left and the blocks became depleted, mess halls were consolidated, and I found myself walking several blocks away for meals, feeling like a transient stranger at a mess hall not in my own block. Most of my family had relocated to Cincinnati by the time Topaz closed, but my father and mother, my youngest brother Lee, my son and I remained until the end of October, 1945. How often in those weeks, at night as I looked at darkened windows of neighboring barracks, I would think of the events that had brought us to this place, of people I would never see again, and wonder what lay ahead in time for us. When we were first interned at Tanforan, my son had been five or six months old, and now as we were about to leave camp, he was past his fourth birthday. He had never seen a concrete building, or even a regular house, a city, a lawn, a park, a bush in bloom, people with other faces and coloring, and so I saw through his eyes, the fresh sight of a wondering child, the outside world from another perspective and accepted the release as he did.